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ABSTRACT

As community assets, schools are central to community development and are best suited to provide a learning community that can build the whole community's capacity to address educational disadvantage. Community capacity building means strengthening a community's ability to become self-reliant by increasing social cohesion and social capital. In Australia, the "whole-of-government" approach refers to enabling different agencies to work together to integrate service delivery. Education Queensland's Partners for Success is its whole-of-government approach to educational community capacity building. The Queensland ministerial advisory committee on issues pertaining to Indigenous education commissioned a research team to report on current community capacity building initiatives by schools towards Aboriginal communities. In 2001, state government schools had just begun training for Partners for Success. Those who had done the training had a far greater understanding of community capacity building. Interviews and focus groups conducted in schools across Queensland revealed that most schools listed various activities undertaken in the name of school-community partnerships, but few indicated a planned approach unless they were involved in Partners for Success. No school talked about interdepartmental collaboration as evidence of community capacity building. The concept of community capacity building was not understood in this sense. Catholic schools talked about community participation in terms of school/church/community relationships. Independent schools had a common understanding of partnerships with community, especially if they were community schools. (Contains 54 references.) (TD)

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COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

A paper presented at the
Australian Association for Research in Education Conference,
Brisbane, 2002.

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Abstract

As community assets, schools are central to a community's learning and development, and therefore are best placed to provide a learning community that has the potential to build the capacity of the whole community to address collaboratively educational disadvantage. This research project examined current strategies and initiatives relating to whole-of-government approaches that impact on education. It case studied effective practices in establishing learning communities and the delivery of cross agency services in a collaborative and cooperative manner. This paper is in two sections: Part A the literature review, and Part B the results of the study.

Part A: Introduction

> If we really want to change the participation patterns of Aboriginal people in schools, then schools have to change as well.[i]
>
> There is no point in Aboriginal people having power to make decisions unless we make sure they have the knowledge, skills and capacity to make those decisions.[ii]

May O'Brien's call to schools to change is a reminder that all stakeholders are involved and responsible for educational outcomes. John Ah Kit identifies the upskilling of stakeholders as a prerequisite to participation. Administrators and teachers also need the capacity to engage with local communities to bring about the outcomes desired. Bob Collins, in his report on Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory,[iii] gave, what he called, a wake-up-call to all involved 'to reverse a trend that is utterly destructive'. Poor educational attainment and achievement on the part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continues to be an issue for Australian education.

Purpose of the literature review

This review outlines the historical antecedents to the community capacity building (CCB) concept. It looks at international literature and projects, then, by way of defining the concept, it identifies the key elements of CCB, explains them in education terms and draws up a taxonomy of observable indicators for education systems and schools. It concludes with a review of the theoretical underpinnings of community capacity building.

Historic Antecedents of Community Capacity Building

Community Capacity Building as a concept has its roots in a much older movement called Community Development. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s much was written about education and community collaboration, or the lack of it. This work came from writers such as Ivan Illich (1976)[iv] in his *Deschooling Society*, and Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971)[v]. In the radical critiques of schooling it was recognised that education could be a radical tool for change if it was linked with community needs and desires.

At the same time as this educational thinking was being developed, work was being done in the area of social development in communities, particularly urban sites. In 1980, Schonenberg and Rosenbaum[vi] explored the concept of viability in local communities and the way residents pursue their livelihood. They

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explained the idea of *community capability* as one in which its residents work together for social order, setting goals and carrying through with these goals. This was achieved if communities established mechanisms to define and enforce public roles and responsibilities; set up communications, leadership and training for those jobs, made decisions about policy, and established networks for exchange. The point is made that in most communities this is done without outside intervention. Where professional workers are appointed they needed to deliver services in a way that enhanced people's autonomy, self-respect, and their ability to work things out for themselves. While community development required input from outside experts, control needed to be located firmly within the community.

Early research work on the antecedents of community capacity building is found within the disciplines of Adult Education (Freire, 1972a[vii], 1972b[viii]), and Community Work (Alinsky, 1969[ix], 1971[x]). All of these early writings indicated that strategic partnerships were essential for real development to occur. Community development required education that was based on the direct needs of the community as identified by them, and action once problems were identified. The development literature throughout this period highlighted the value and productivity of partnerships.

Today, in social development there is a focus on integrating all the various stakeholders in capacity building.

> Capacity building refers to investment in people, institutions and practices that will, together, enable countries in the region to achieve their development objectives. (World Bank (1997).[xi]

Investment in people, institutions and practices requires knowledge, time and dollars. While some emphasis on the physical resources is a part of the capacity building process, it is not the whole.

> Capacity development is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives.[xii]

But there are tensions arising out of some community expectations of providers. "Capacity building includes institutional support in the form of finances for office space, salaries and vehicles" (Makumbe, 1998)[xiii]. Material gains of community capacity building are few and far between and not necessarily provided by governments or funding bodies.

The 1994 report to the Commission on Sustainable Development on capacity building, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), focused mainly on the role of United Nations system agencies in supporting capacity-building. Most were engaged in building capacity for the formulation of plans and strategies in support of sustainable development in areas such as health, industry, education, the environment and human settlements. More research into the dynamics of capacity-building was seen to be necessary, as was improved inter-agency coordination and United Nations system capacity at the field level. The acknowledgement that the UN needed better capacity in its interface with communities was the point at which the discussion and models of community capacity building for provider organizations and government shifted to a more participative model.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (1996, p. 2).[xiv] defines Community Capacity Building thus:

> Capacity-development, like sustainable development, encompasses a wide range of aspects, including the human, technological, organisational, financial, scientific, cultural and institutional. It is not easy to define. Indeed, most discussions on the topic quickly tend to broaden out to deal with the overall process of development. . . . capacity-building is the process and means through which national Governments and local communities develop the necessary skills and expertise to manage their environment and natural resources in a sustainable manner within their daily activities. The main ideas behind this concept are the following:
>
> (a) Strengthening peoples' capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods;

(b) A cross-sectoral multidisciplinary approach to planning and implementation;
(c) Emphasis on organizational and technological change and innovation;
(d) Emphasis on the need to build social capital (i.e. voluntary forms of social regulation) through experimentation and learning;
(e) Emphasis on developing the skills and performance of both individuals and institutions.

Capacity development was originally used as a strategy to implement state plans. But through the work of non-government organizations the pressure to widen the focus to include communities in development plans increased. To respond to this changing context for capacity-building, there were attempts to develop a deeper understanding of the institutional and capacity-building issues. More emphasis was then placed on the role of users and beneficiaries.

> [They] are becoming less directive and less technocratic, more supportive and facilitative. In the past, [they] concentrated on the "supply" side of capacity-building programmes, including the provision of more *training*, more systems improvement, more equipment and infrastructure, more financial resources and more technical cooperation. The water and agriculture sectors are obvious examples. Increasingly, the focus is now on the "demand" side of capacity-building programmes. Work on HIV/AIDS is a case in point. Rather than fund direct organizational improvements for government agencies, UNDP is now funding the growth of *networks* of private organizations in South Asia with a view to developing their ability both to mobilize public involvement and to encourage Governments in the region to build their capacity to respond. In this sense, capacity "building" is becoming capacity "enhancement", as donor programmes try to augment the abilities, motivations, needs and pattern of incentives that already exist. Such an emphasis on the "demand" side raises deeper issues about the capacity of the political and bureaucratic systems of countries to both capture and respond to the wishes of its citizens. ([xv]p.2)

The ongoing work of the NGOs has significantly influenced donor organizations. They are the voice of the civil society. The shift from the donor being the provider to being a *partner* is clear in the above quotation. The ability of different groups and organizations to work together has become more important at all levels. The growing scale and complexity of capacity issues at the level of networks of organizations (e.g., improving national systems of primary school education or criminal justice) are compelling development organizations and governments to collaborate on a wider scale. While the demand for change emerges from civil society, it is also apparent that there are other drivers, information *technology* not being the least of these. The growth in tele-communications makes networking easier, and networking is a major component of successful modern community capacity building. This will be taken up later.

At the Australian Commonwealth and local Queensland government level the call by Indigenous peak bodies for governments to form collaborative relationships has, for years, mostly fallen on deaf ears. However, in 1992[xvi], after intense lobbying, there was a national commitment to improve outcomes in the delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the Council for Reconcilliation. And in 1997 the Prime Minister requested the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth and State Service Provision to develop indicators that measured performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The Ministerial Advisory Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (MACATSIE) Strategy of 1999[xvii] in Queensland, and the Ministerial Committee for Education Employment and Training and Youth Affairs Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2000)[xviii] are landmark documents in government accountability.

This historical backgrounding is preliminary to defining the nature of community capacity building. It gives an understanding of the antecedents of the current approach. The next section attempts to define Community Capacity Building within the Australian context.

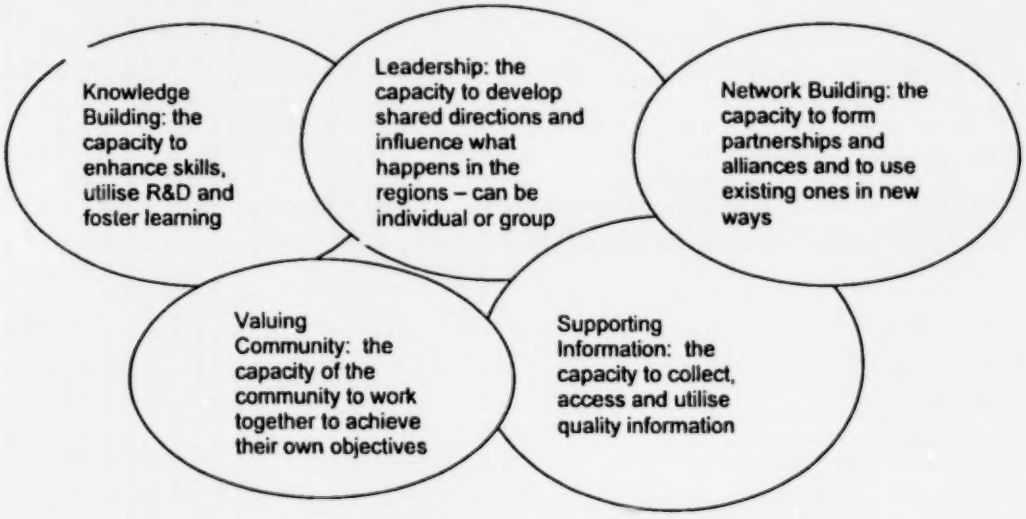
The Elements of Capacity Building

In this section various elements of community capacity building are analyzed with specific reference to their potential to work for Indigenous Education. Because the Queensland Government's *Whole of Government Approach* to community capacity building has been influenced by regional development literature and research, and the work of the UN in particular, it is a good place to start to see what is understood by *community capacity building*.

Garlick (1999)[xix] is a Professor of Management and director of the Regional Research Institute at Southern Cross University and a key player in regional development in Australia. He identified five major elements of capacity building for regional Australia.

1) Knowledge building: the capacity to enhance skills, utilize research and development and foster learning;
2) Leadership: the capacity to develop shared directions and influence what happens in the regions;
3) Network Building: the capacity to form partnerships and alliances;
4) Valuing community and the capacity of the community to work together to achieve their own objectives; and
5) Supporting information: the capacity to collect, access and utilize quality information.

THE ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY - Adapted from Garlick (1999).
Capacity Building in Regional WA


Knowledge Building: the capacity to enhance skills, utilise R&D and foster learning
Leadership: the capacity to develop shared directions and influence what happens in the regions – can be individual or group
Network Building: the capacity to form partnerships and alliances and to use existing ones in new ways
Valuing Community: the capacity of the community to work together to achieve their own objectives
Supporting Information: the capacity to collect, access and utilise quality information

He draws his framework from several sources including the classic *Small is Beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered,* by E. K. Schumacher[xx]. What Schumacher saw as beautiful was not small communities as such, but the close association people had based on ethical relationships and common goals that produced recognisable outcomes.

A number of studies (McKinsey, 1996[xxi]; Fulop & Brennan, 1997)[xxii] show that *leadership* is the ingredient to make this happen. Those that made good leaders are able to establish a leadership team, built trust among stakeholders, forge a strong identity and have a clear energizing vision for their region, set tough but achievable goals and get some 'quick runs on the board'. Creating learning communities requires leaders of communities to be inclusive of educational institutions in their planning, e.g. annual operational plans

and other such strategies, so that they become embedded in the strategic plans of the region or community.

Valuing the community relates to the more intangible but distinctive qualities of a place that make it worthwhile for the community to invest their social capital by working together to enhance the efficiency and quality of life. It is the socio-cultural attributes and historical influences that provide the essence of what makes a particular community or school so unique. This is particularly so in Indigenous communities. Leveraging the unique qualities of a region is what will give it the competitive edge.

The other elements of *connectivity and embeddedness* relate to the extent to which a region can *network to form partnerships* and strategic alliances within the region and outside. All of the elements aim to improve the economic standing of the communities in question.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has worked on these concepts for some time and concludes that one of the characteristics of the learning economy is the degree of linkage between outcomes and input from universities and research institutions[xxiii]. Research institutions can assist in the *collection and interpretation of data* to inform decision-making and data to benchmark performance. How these elements might be incorporated into strategic plans of schools is taken up later in the report.

The following Table shows the five elements, explaining them in educational terms. The second column shows how schools might recognize these elements in school settings.

Table 1
The key elements and observable indicators of Community Capacity Building

Element	Possible observable indicators in school environments
1. Knowledge building – this relates to the school's capacity to adopt continuous improvement processes, generate and implement new ideas, link R&D with regional needs, build and retain needed skills and pursue organisational learning that yields changes in the way people think and act to create the results they desire.	• Knowledge of the full range of funding options and access to these sources for the benefit of students and community • Entrepreneurship curriculum options o ICT skills – providing opportunity to community to participate o Management skills o Mentoring and upskilling communities that school could help broker (career teachers have a major role here) • Staff professional development in capacity building
2. Leadership – The ability to represent the interests of all stakeholder groups in such a way that has them *working together* to achieve the sustainable vision and strategic directions of the community. Credibility has to be earned by results of partnerships, inclusion and the resolution of conflict though dialogue and working together across sectors rather than the vertical lines of power. A leader gets quick runs on the ladder, has tough but achievable goals, has a strong identity and vision, establishes trust and has the capacity to build a team.	• Promotion of CCB by the Principal and the System (e.g. Ed Qld or CEO) • Ensuring ASSPA committees can operate. • Review of outcomes of ASSPA as part of the Annual Operational Plan (AOPs) of the school • Community consultation process to contribute to AOPs • Report to ASSPA Committees • Documented goals in Principal's Annual Goal Statements • Evidence of leadership in regard to community capacity building

3. *Network building* – relates to the extent to which a school can form partnerships and strategic alliances for the benefit of the community. The role of technology is important here.	• Practical focus on establishing partnerships with communities and other agencies • Participation (with Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) by the Principal or System Rep. on Annual Operational Plans of particular communities • Schools have the opportunities to meet/network, share ideas etc, e.g. Principal's Forums, Secondary Principal's Associations, Primary Principal's Associations • Ongoing dialogue with Indigenous leaders • Networking in cross sectoral manner
4. *Valuing community* – refers to the value placed on the distinctive qualities of the community that make it worthwhile for a group to invest their social capital by working together to enhance the quality of life.	• Staff having the opportunity to broaden their responsibilities beyond the classroom – the extended classroom. • Use of Indigenous expertise in curriculum • Employment of Indigenous people in the school
5. *Supporting information and analysis* – refers to the availability of data that is accessible and updateable about the institutions own performance and access to data that enables performance benchmarking.	• Strategy for tracking students throughout their schooling and on completion of Year 12 (or equivalent) e.g. Student Alumni • Data is available and benchmarked appropriately e.g. student attendance, student learning outcomes, suspensions & exclusions records, enrolment profiling • Ongoing critique of the organisational discourse

Table 1 is an attempt to take the five elements of community capacity building and to identify possible observable indicators for Indigenous education against each of them. This activity was conducted by the research team with administrators and teachers from Education Queensland and Catholic Education. Other frameworks have been developed for different situations, such as the United Nations.

The UN has developed a Framework of four interrelated dimensions for sustainable capacity development:[xxiv]

1. *Individual.* Education, on-the-job training, and formal and informal skills development to accomplish tasks and solve problems are core requirements. Individuals must be able to participate in decisions and have a clear understanding of their role and function. They must also have *adequate incentives*, salary structures and accountability. Values, expectations and power relations need to be recognized. But this is no guarantee that the person will be productive or effective. Other things are necessary.

2. *Entity.* A well-trained, productive person needs access to finance, information, technology, infrastructure and other resources. This often means working within (or related to) an entity that has an organizational structure with a clear mission, and clear goals, functions, systems and resources (such as a public body, a private business, an NGO or community-based group). Some of these entities may be informal groups working at the community level.

3. *Interrelationships between entities.* Organizations and groups interact with others for a common purpose. These can often be seen as a system. For example, a micro-credit system for women could include a credit institution, relevant line ministries, cooperative/business/marketing NGOs, small businesses and women's community-based groups. Themes, sections, institutions and geographic divisions comprise one or more systems where entities interact for a common purpose.

4. *Enabling environment.* Sustainable capacities for individuals, entities and systems require a positive enabling environment for addressing cross-sectoral issues relevant to all parts of society-the state, civil society and the private sector.

For an enabling environment to work four issues need to be taken into account. According to the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP) these are:

- Institutional development policies and plans, legal frameworks, ability and willingness reform, distribution of institutional responsibilities, public sector and human resource policies, incentives, and so on.
- Sociopolitical-society vision; formal and informal values and standards; democratic processes; power relationships, particularly the role of women; sources of consensus and conflict; human security and the special cases of countries in crises or transition that need to be taken into consideration.
- Economic-stable and equitable fiscal and monetary policy; management and distribution of resources and assets; the impact of the external sector, particularly trade, investment, official development assistance, technology and debt management.
- Natural resource management and environment-the impact and importance of the natural resource base and the sustainable management of the environment.

It is also suggested that ongoing assessment and evaluation is built into the plan. This capacity assessment approach involves four steps:

Step 1. Mapping the starting point
Step 2. Determining where to be-and establishing objectives
Step 3. Determining a change strategy to get there-the How
Step 4. Determining what capacities are needed to get there-the What.

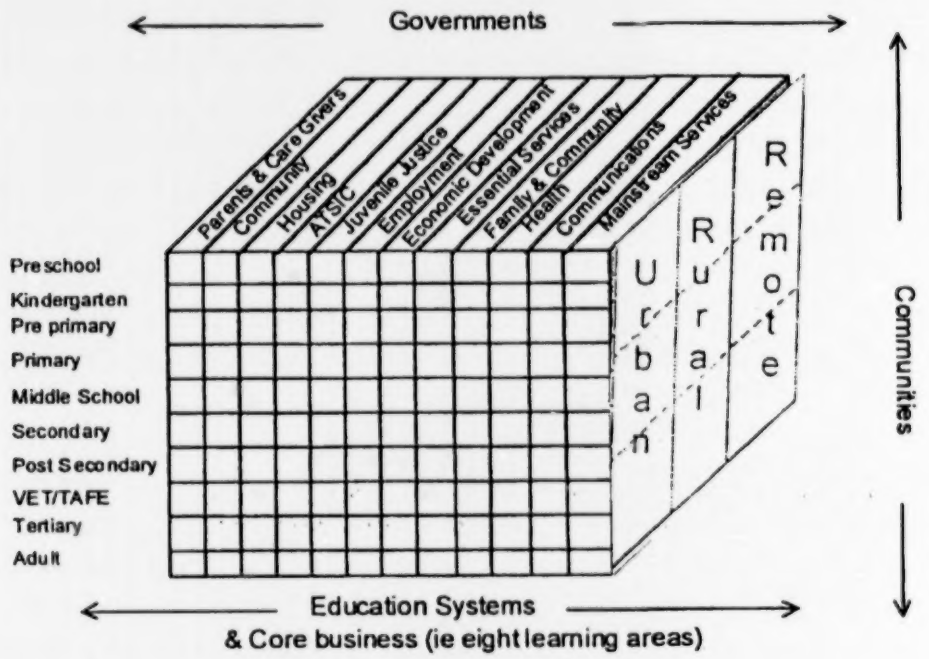
A similar approach has been adopted for the Queensland Community Enhancement Strategy and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Annual Operational Plans.

The Australian Approach - Indigenous Education and Community Capacity Building

With an eye to partnerships, Ken Wyatt (2001)[xxv] suggested that a Partnership Cube (collaboration between educational institutions, communities and government departments) bears investigation. The concept was originally mooted at a meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (2000, p. 54). The notion of partnerships has been promoted for sometime around Indigenous education and health issues. The MCEETYA Task Force on Indigenous Education released a discussion paper (2001) called *Solid Foundations: Health and Education Partnership for Indigenous Children aged 0-8 years.* In it the call for collaboration and partnerships between government agencies to overcome the major problems of Indigenous children's poor health was urged. However, Partington

(2002)[xxvi] suggests that trying to come up with one framework for all Indigenous education settings has never worked and questions whether this model will.

The Partnership Cube for Indigenous Education



(Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, p. 54)[xxvii]

While much of this model is built into the Queensland Government's 2010 document, more is needed in terms of raising the levels of outcomes for Indigenous students.

> There is a challenge facing education in Queensland as we move into an era where knowledge supercedes information and technology transforms longstanding relationships of time and space. It is to become a learning society – the Smart State – in which global forces favour the adaptable, and the key resources will be human and social capital rather than just physical and material resources.[xxviii]

The 2010 document goes on to encourage Queenslanders to reconceptualise their schools as part of the learning society, embedding them in communities in new ways. It is an optimistic document on the whole, stating "education needs something other than the popular metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion as driving forces of change." This is particularly pertinent for educators of Indigenous children. The disparities in opportunity arising from wealth distribution, cultures and location need dedication to overcome. While acknowledging that schools are community assets, they must be "shared with parents and community, cooperate with business, and coordinated with other government and community services."

Community Capacity Building is a new term for Australian Education. While it has been around for sometime in the approaches of the OECD and fields like Community Development, it has now been taken up by the Queensland Government in its Community Engagement Policy[xxix] as a major platform. The principles for engagement are:

- Inclusiveness, connecting with those hardest to reach;
- Reaching out, changing ways government and community work together for the better;
- Mutual Respect, listening, understanding and acting on experiences different from our own;
- Integrity, engagement as a means of promoting integrity in the democratic processes of government; and
- Affirming Diversity, changing the processes of government to incorporate diverse values and interests.

The Government Department that has responsibility to oversee the implementation of this policy is the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP). In order to implement the policy DATSIP has developed a Ten Year Partnership with the Queensland Government. Its aim is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through a *whole-of-government* approach to outcomes and performance measures in partnership with other agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The plan is to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the planning, design and delivery of their core business. A steering committee was set up with specialist working groups to identify key outcomes and performance measures. The key areas identified are: Justice, Family Violence, Reconciliation, Human Services (including Education), Service Delivery, Economic Development, Community Governance, Land Heritage and Natural Resources.

The Queensland Government's response to the Cape York Justice Plan (13 May 2002 Draft) "Meeting the Challenges, Making the Choices," Education Queensland was given four tasks, including: improving school attendance rates (in partnership with Queensland Health and the Department of Families). This is to be done through the following broad strategies:

- Public awareness campaigns targeting parents and students;
- Working with Community Justice Groups and community councils to develop attendance and truancy strategies;
- Implementing meal/breakfast programs;
- Addressing major health issues impacting on attendance;
- Using information and communication technology;
- Linking attendance strategies to drug and alcohol reduction strategies

The results to be achieved from this strategy are to be decided upon by Education Queensland in consultation with partnering agencies.

The second task is to develop curriculum and implement relevant curriculum through

- further application of the New Basics curriculum to all Cape York Schools following the evaluation of current trials;
- the extension of the Partners for Success strategy to all Cape York schools;
- implementing teaching and learning practices for English as a second language
- using cross cultural pedagogy that engages students and delivers improved outcomes; and
- more effective linkages between schools, TAFE and appropriate sport and recreation programs and other life skills programs promoting job readiness.

The third task is fostering workforce reform by increasing cultural responsiveness, competence and professionalism of the workforce of the Cape. This is to be done by:

- changing current expectations and practices of school staff and administration through professional development
- Establishing accountabilities for teachers to achieve agreed targets
- Providing enhanced flexibility to school principals and leadership teams in the use of resources, including staff, which are linked to clear accountability outcomes;
- Joining health, education and police orientation and professional development programs, working with public sector unions to encourage innovation in teaching, administration and resource usage and rewarding such practice.

The fourth task is to encourage school leaders to work with other agencies and communities to improve learning conditions for students. This is to done by:

- Building the conditions in which students are safe, well nourished, healthy and able to engage in education
- Developing opportunities for training and work experience outside the community
- Fostering innovation and linking this to improved learning outcomes for students by clear accountabilities for improving systematic learning about what works, what doesn't and why.

The general thrust of the government's response is to place responsibility back on its staff, and this is good. However, in terms of 'community capacity building' there are a few gaps. The encouragement to be 'innovative' in teaching practices, has often resulted in a 'watered down' or 'dumming down' approach to existing curriculum. There will need to be accountability measures built into this freedom. There is little encouragement for school personnel to engage with the Indigenous community. One of the fundamental tenants of community development is to engage the community at all levels of decision making. If this is implicit in the strategies, then it needs to be made explicit. The government's response lacks this engagement with the Indigenous communities.

Education Queensland's *Partners for Success*[xxx] outlines the whole-of-government approach to educational community capacity building. Performance measures for the whole of government approach in education are the retention rates from year 8 to year 12, and the literacy and numeracy levels in years 3, 5, and 7. (See Table 2)

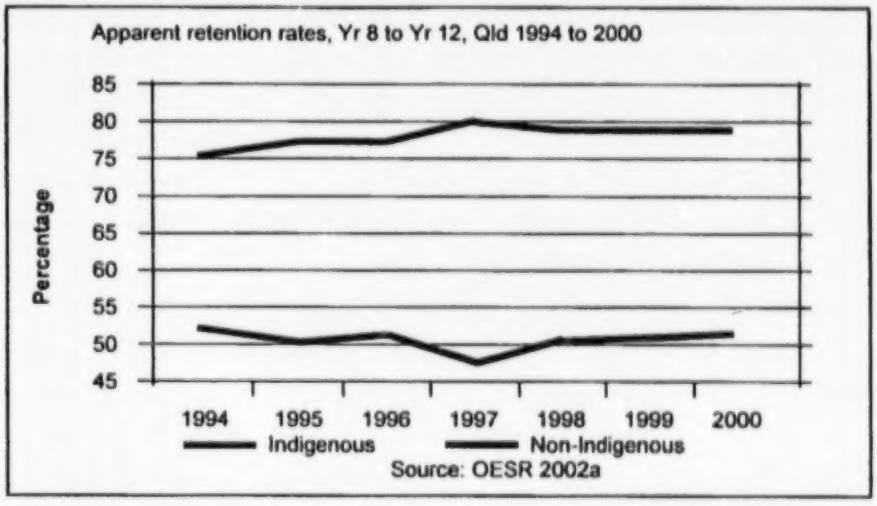
Prior to the *Partners For Success* policy, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (MACATSIE) – which has since been replaced by the QIECB - developed a document that supports the challenge of building the capacity of Indigenous communities. *Walking our Talk – A Framework for Increasing Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Educational Decision Making*[xxxi] sets out the stages necessary for increasing community involvement. Capacity assessment has been conducted in some leading agencies, e.g. Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation[xxxii].

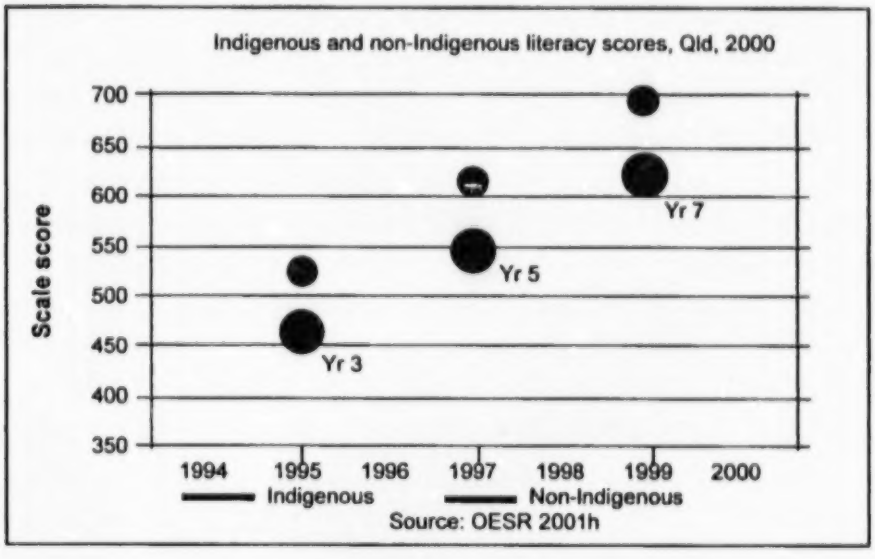
The group that has been appointed to support *Partners for Success* is the *Indigenous Education and Training Alliance* (IETA). Based in Cairns, this Education Queensland initiative was formed in 2001 to "broker and present professional development and training to support Partners for Success" (ITEA Brochure, 2001[xxxiii]). It is a branch of the Learning Foundation and the Staff College structure in Education Queensland. The target audiences are community members, teachers, teacher aides, administration staff, principals and advisory visiting staff. Among the initial programs listed is "Community Capacity and Contribution". The Indigenous Education and Training Alliance's website[xxxiv] has the following definitions of Community Capacity Building:

> Strengthening of the ability of a community – or a region, or society in general – to become collectively self-reliant by increasing social cohesion and building social capital, is often described as developing its *community capacity*.
>
> Community capacity is the extent to which members of a community can work together effectively, and includes the ability to:
>
> - develop and sustain strong relationships,
> - solve problems and make group decisions, and
> - collaborate effectively to identify goals and get work done."

TABLE 2: Draft - KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for Queensland Whole of Government Indigenous Outcomes

HUMAN SERVICES - EDUCATION





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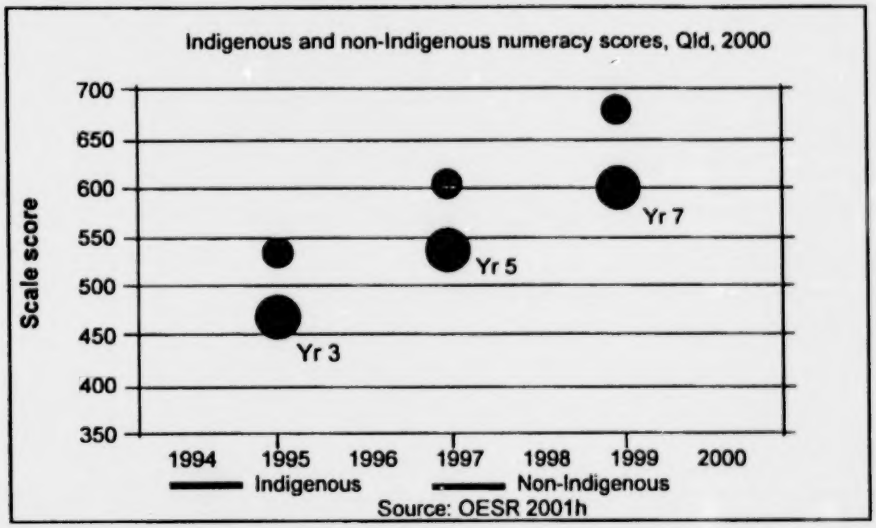


Using *Measuring Community Capacity Building* (Aspen Institute, 1996[xxxv]), IETAs understandings of community capacity building were built into their website:

> People live in communities. But the real importance of "living in community" is that people – and groups of people – develop the ways and means to care for each other, to nurture the talents and leadership that enhance the quality of community life, and to tackle the problems that threaten the community and the opportunities which can help it.
>
> When people do these things, communities become healthy; when they do not, communities deteriorate. Communities that have the ways and means to undertake challenges demonstrate "capacity".
>
> Without capacity, communities are merely collections of individuals acting without concern for the common good; they are without the necessary ingredients required to develop a healthier community. Communities without capacity really are not communities in any meaningful sense, but have given way to negative conditions like apathy, poverty or ineptitude.

These quotations are set in an understanding of the 'partnership' being between parents, community and the school. There is little mention of the broader understandings of partnerships that the 2010 document alludes to: business, whole of government and community connections. On the page about community connections there is some mention of community justice groups and the health department, but that is about as far as it goes.

Community capacity has also been described as the combined influence of a community's commitment, resources, and skills which can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems (Mayer, cited in Mattesich and Monsey, 1997).[xxxvi] While this quote seems to incorporate groups outside the school and family, there is no mention of practical ways to do this on the webpage dedicated to that purpose.[xxxvii]

Indigenous Education peak bodies have, in fact, been calling for this approach (collaborative approaches) for over a decade. The most serious effort to make accountable those organizations involved in Indigenous issues came from the Reconciliation Council in 1992. They called for a coordination of effort and benchmarking of outcomes.

One of the conclusions that must be drawn is that the understanding of the school being a "hub of the community", beyond the traditional parent/teacher nexus, will take some time to achieve on the part of teachers and communities.

Possibilities of Community Capacity Building in Queensland

In Queensland schools Principals need to have adequate incentive to lead the community capacity building exercise so that it will impact positively on outcomes for Indigenous education. This 'incentive' should not be a negative one. However, clear directions and reporting structures within the School's Annual Operational Plans could assist this process. The Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) program Dare to Lead (2001)[xxxviii] encouraged Principals to take up the challenge of reaching out beyond their schools to the communities in which they were located seeking their support in setting and achieving beneficial outputs for the local region.

Information technology access is important and has been identified as one of the primary needs of regional Indigenous communities. Programs that are effective have been identified.

- i-STAR[xxxix] provides financial assistance to industry, educational and training institutions and local authorities to undertake projects that contribute to overcoming the Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills shortage, especially in regional Queensland. James Cook University's Cairns Campus received funding for a rural and remote program that included an ICT camp and career nights focused on the special needs of students under represented in ICT careers, including women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.
- There are various other initiatives under the State Government's Department of Innovation and Information Economy. A commitment to putting broadband through the north of the state has been made.
- Balkanu's Strategic directions paper (2001)[xl] identifies the lack of skills in entrepreneurship and intends to address this through the Family Income Management programme and in cooperation with Education Queensland. Remote communities also have the option of applying for funding through the Step-by-Step Program[xli] which is a five step program to assist communities in applying for funding for training.

The ability to tap into funding sources is vital for capacity enhancement.

Queensland's *Whole of Government Approach* is an attempt to bring all government departments together to address the issues of educational outcomes. The Department responsible for making this happen is the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (DATSIP). There are some examples of TAFE being brought to the table in terms of discussing training needs. Schools tend not to be involved in the Annual Operational Plans of communities at this stage. (p.c. DATSIP, June, 2002)

Theoretical underpinnings of Community Capacity Building

The discourses behind the concept of 'capacity building' come out of the globalized discourses of human capital theory and new public management theory. (Taylor & Henry, n.d.)[xlii]. Human capital theory emphasizes life long learning and user pays strategies with a focus on individual achievement for the common good. New public management theory has frameworks for governance with tighter accountability. In educational terms this can be seen in areas of curriculum and assessment and administrative accountability measures. The focus is on outcomes.

What 2010 does, and so does Partners for Success, is to adopt the neo-liberal agenda of the OECD with its focus on social cohesion and social exclusion as discourses which validate such strategies as negotiated accountability frameworks, agreed targets and mutual obligation. Fast capitalism has negated talk of socio-economic status as a measure of poverty and instead talks of the digital divide and social

exclusion as a reason for capacity building. But 2010 makes a shift in its terminology from 'at-risk' students to the 'educationally at-risk'. Thus retaining some hope and some mechanisms for structural change

> [The] existence of a differentiated school system can be a source of social exclusion, particularly if the system works largely on a hierarchical basis forcing the students with the least educational promise into a lower tier school system that can become exclusionary in its own right, apart from the impact on educational achievement it may have...The differentiation itself can lead not only to poorer education in the bottom tier, but also to a less inclusive education process as children in the lower tier may feel less valued by society.[xliii]

Ultimately, the children in the lower tier begin to believe that they are not smart enough to get well paying jobs and, eventually, lose faith in themselves and the value of the school system.

Social Exclusion Theory

In order to understand the relationship between the education system that serves the needs of the majority and those individuals who make up the minority, it is useful to look at the theoretical framework mentioned in the section above, the quotation from Klasen used the term "social exclusion". The idea of social exclusion was originally used in France in the 1970's. The then Secretary of State for Social Action, Rene Lenoir, recognized the need to "improve conditions for those the economy was leaving behind and to strengthen social cohesion"[xliv]. The notion of social exclusion has taken up broader significance over time and has been applied to many situations both within the OECD context and in terms of analyzing international development contexts. At its most simplistic level, social exclusion is best expressed as the failure to participate in and be recognized by society.

The social exclusion perspective states that all individuals should be able to participate in society and feel that they are valued by it. It is different from the poverty perspective in that it places the emphasis on the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and society[xlv]. The social exclusion argument highlights the role that political, economic and social arrangements play in excluding individuals from the normal routines of the community and society, and the role that solidarity amongst those people who are excluded can play in changing the situation to their benefit[xlvi].

It may seem from a quick analysis that the way to solve the problem of exclusion is to ensure that all people have the right to participate in society and have the right to access the systems and services that society provides. In fact, equality of access does not mean that all people are able to benefit from services because not every one is equally capable of accessing the services that are available. Poverty is often seen as the main reason for preventing individuals from feeling a full part of social processes, but issues such as language capabilities, understanding of how the system works, cultural differences, etc., may influence or impact upon an individuals' perceived ability to participate fully in society. Klasen discusses this further:

> While income poverty is only one possible (and neither necessary nor sufficient) factor causing social exclusion, persistent or recurrent unemployment can generate social exclusion directly as the involuntarily unemployed are excluded from the world of work, an important aspect of citizenship and participation. This way, unemployment is seen as an intrinsic problem, even if there are appropriate systems in place that ensure that unemployment does not lead to poverty.[xlvii]

In exploring the notion of social exclusion in relation to children, education and future opportunities, Klasen draws heavily from Amartya Sen's work [xlviii], stating that social exclusion can be seen to be a:

> ...denial of integration into the community, ability to participate in the community and public life and enjoy the bases of self-respect.

Why Talk About Social Exclusion?

The social exclusion framework is simply a way of helping us to understand why some people are excluded and some are not. It is particularly useful in helping us to understand the factors that contribute to social inequity because it goes beyond poverty and incorporates the roles that political, economic and social factors play. In terms of education, it helps to understand why, in being denied access to an adequate and effective education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being denied the opportunity to integrate themselves into the social and economic aspects of broader society. In the longer term, this translates into being denied the opportunity to feel that they are valid and contributing members of society. In practical terms, the framework also enables us to identify areas where capacity building activities are most necessary.
The Social Exclusion argument is very similar to the one used by Noel Pearson in a number of his speeches and writings. In his Charles Perkins Memorial Oration at the University of Sydney (October 25, 2001), Pearson restated his position on "passive welfare". He maintains that rather than experiencing the "enabling" aspects of welfare (i.e. the safety net between jobs, provision of adequate and responsive healthcare), Indigenous Australians have become permanently unemployed and marginalized by the system. Instead of income support being something that is temporary, it has become a permanent destination. The situation becomes a vicious cycle – poor education, unemployment, receiving welfare benefits, feeling that they are unable/incapable of contributing to the system/economy because they are unemployed, resignation to passive welfare dependence.

Pearson argues that efforts to address issues such as imprisonments and substance abuse have been ineffective because they have not required that the individuals or the communities themselves take responsibility for the issues[xlix]. He states that responses such as the provision of legal aid and drug and alcohol rehabilitation allow individuals to taking the role of the victim of an unjust system. While it may be true that the system is unjust (and many would argue effectively that it is), Pearson is stating that, in passively accepting that they are victims of an unjust system, Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander communities are condemning themselves to perpetuating the cycle of dependence. In other words, as long as they remain "passive welfare dependants", they will continue to be socially excluded, with little or no sense of control or influence, and no capacity to change.

Pearson argues that in order to break free of the welfare dependency, communities must take charge themselves and demand that conditions change. He argues that, in order to make the government accountable to them, Indigenous communities must first be morally accountable to themselves – they must take responsibility for their own situation and they must organise and act to bring about changes that will change their community for the good. This change will require that communities mobilise to influence inside their own "cultural" structures. Equally, they must gain the skills to enable them to interact more effectively with structures outside their own culture – for example education and health systems. For the purposes of this paper, this means that the community must build the capacity to work with the education system to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander children receive the skills and qualifications that are necessary to enable them to operate comfortably both in their own culture and in the wider culture of the "Australian State". Equally, they must set about changing the systems to meet the needs of their own.[l]

Community Capacity Building and the Status Quo

As this paper stated from the outset, there has been a good deal of policy that attempts to address the issues of poor educational attainment on the part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We also recounted how, despite the presence of these policies, improvements have been slow and insufficient. The knock-on effect of consistently poor education results has implications for the health sector, for employment opportunities, for rates of detention, and for long-term optimism. Something has got to change.

If we are to take a social exclusion perspective to analysing the set of problems and issues that contribute to the current situation, it quickly becomes apparent that the situation is complex. The recently released

Fitzgerald Report[ii], while looking at the socio-economic context from the perspective of assessing the impact of substance abuse, echoes the same sentiments:

> The Government's task...is to encourage the community to accept responsibility, to empower it to deal with its problems, to assist it to do so and to provide necessary resources, facilities and support.[iii]

In other words, in order for things to change, those people who are currently excluded from "regular society" must acquire the skills and capacities to organise themselves and reform the social system to meet their needs. Equally, those bureaucrats and community members who currently are most influential in determining what the social structures look like (i.e. the education system) must recognise their own responsibility to enable those people who are excluded to gain access to the system. All of this boils down to one thing: community capacity building – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must gain the skills and the confidence to influence the education system in a way that enables them to benefit from it in the same way that non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do.

Broad Analysis of "Whole of Government" Policy

The current policy climate in Australia is very supportive towards the notion of community capacity building. The notion of "whole of government"[iiii] is meant to enable different ministries or departments to work together more effectively and to enable services from different sectors to become integrated. Equally, in order for services to be responsive to the needs of the population, the whole of government approach acknowledges that individual "communities" within the population must be able to articulate their own needs and to lobby and influence for change. This process of lobbying and influencing government is known as "civil society". There will inevitably be a certain amount of competition for attention and, ultimately, funds – the government has a finite budget and eventually decisions must be made with regards to whose interests to put first and hence whose interests merit the most money.

The process of competition and prioritisation of need is a part of a healthy democratic process. However, within civil society some groups will be more powerful than others simply because they are more articulate or more adept at influencing the government to favour their perspective. The weakness of the lobbying approach lies in the fact that the more deprived communities tend to have the least skills and capacities to influence for change, yet they are the ones with the most need to influence. In order to overcome the inequity, the ideal is to have an overarching state framework which provides consistency in terms of policy and goals, but which allows communities to work within the framework to suit the needs of its community members. Furthermore, a great deal of attention must be given to providing those individuals with the least capacity to change, with the skills they require – i.e. capacity building.

Conclusion

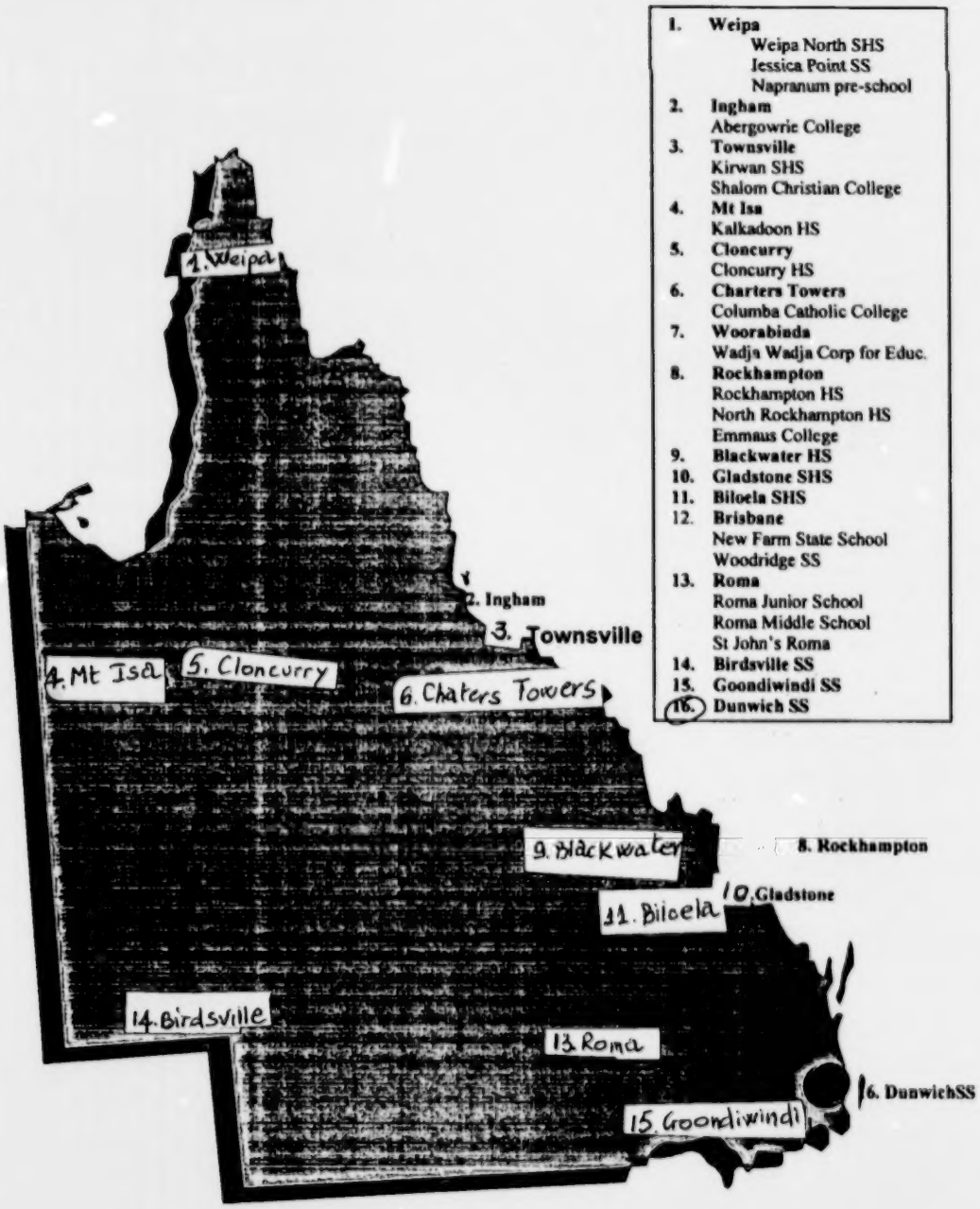
Clearly there is a good deal farther to go before the education system is able to fulfil its obligation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families. The policy groundwork is, for the most part, in place. The key will be in supporting and enabling Indigenous communities to have their say and to effectively influence the schooling system at the local and State level. Equally however, and probably less overtly acknowledged, is the need for the Education systems (and the individuals within it) to take the necessary actions towards opening up to the inputs from the Indigenous communities and allowing themselves to be receptive to new and creative ways of working.

Part B: Ways of researching: Methods

The research team was asked to review the concept of Community Capacity Building by identifying and reporting on current strategies and initiatives both planned and being undertaken by school communities. The team was also asked to report on effective practices in whole of government approaches to establishing learning communities. This was done across all sectors of education in Queensland from Early

Childhood, Schools and TAFEs and across all providers, Education Queensland, the Catholic Education System and Independent Schools.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted across 27 sites. The research sites were:



Map displaying locations of the 24 Schools that were involved in the Case Studies

State Schools

- Biloela State School
- Birdsville State School
- Blackwater State High School
- Cloncurry State High School
- Dunwich State School
- Gladstone State High School
- Goondiwindi State School
- Jessica Point State School
- Kalkadoon SHS
- Kirwan State High School
- New Farm State School
- North Rockhampton State High School
- Rockhampton State High School
- Roma Junior State School
- Roma Middle State School
- Weipa North
- Woodridge State School

Catholic Schools

- St John's School Roma
- Abergowrie College
- Emmaus College
- Columba Catholic College

Independent Schools

- Shalom College
- Napranum Preschool
- Wadja Wadja

Non school sites

- Gladstone Water Board
- Magani Malu Kes
- Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE

The choice of sites

The IECB expressly indicated that they did not want the research teams conducting the six IECB contract projects (UQ, JCU and Russell Moncrieff) to visit the same schools or sites. This would overload the schools and would concentrate the research data from a limited number of schools. Suggested sites were submitted to the IECB for approval so that they could ensure that this request was acceded to. Our decision to chose nine schools from the south, nine from the central region and nine from the north (including 3 sites in the Cape – Weipa North, Jessica Point and Napranum Pre-School), two in the western district (Kalkadoon and Cloncurry) and Magani Melu Kes from Townsville were based on that request. While there were sites that would have suited our purposes these sites were already being visited by the other research teams. The fieldwork was carried out over the period October 2001 to April 2002.

Indigenous researchers and Indigenist research[iv]

The JCU Team felt it was important to privilege the voice of Indigenous stakeholders and to that end Indigenous people were the primary data collectors in the schools. Those assisting with data collection were given a seminar on research methods and had regular meetings while in the process of collecting the data

In the schools the first person to be contacted was the Indigenous Education Worker or the Community Education Officer along with the Principal. Without their cooperation the data would have been much more difficult to access.

The Findings: Effective partnerships between schools and communities

Nearly all schools visited were keen to demonstrate links with Indigenous communities. Those that succeeded were those who had strong leadership both from the Principal or Deputy, and an active and innovative IEW or CEC who had good relationships with the school administration. The power of legislative reporting was seen in the schools involved in *Partners for Success*. At the time of data collection schools involved were part of a pilot program. The roll out this year (2002) should have a greater impact, if cooperation and collaboration is forthcoming. Strong partnerships are possible when there is a combination of factors:

- Educational infrastructure and provision for reporting of outcomes
- A CEC or IEW who is well connected with the local community
- A CEC or IEW who has a strong relationship with the Principal and Deputies and the community
- Cross-agency support co-ordinated to form networks.
- Mentoring is promoted.
- A valuing of community and parental involvement.
- Industry support

Most schools listed various activities undertaken in the name of school community partnerships, but there was little evidence of a planned approach unless schools were involved in the Partners for Success Strategy. The sort of activities listed as evidence of partnership were:

- *Whole School Literacy Plan* framed on Key strategies, key elements of daily literacy program, and meta-cognitive elements (thinking out loud), supplemented by intervention/focused learning episodes.
- *Individual Education Plans* for Special Needs (classified level 5-6 disability).
- *Parents and Citizens Association Fund-raising Activities* conducted according to an annually developed plan.
- *Parent Help Workshops* – to support Literacy and Numeracy skills development at home and to explain 'new' curricula.
- *Information flow* to parents via weekly newsletters, Parental Opinion Survey Results, draft curricula availability, parent/teacher conferences once per term or as requested; parent interviews for Year 2 netted students.
- *Celebrating NAIDOC* – past activities included Aboriginal dancers and carving emus eggs which were illustrated in story books.
- *Displays and Activities* such as Under 8's Day, Book Week, Athletics/Activities Days, School Fete, Under 8's Disco, Easter in the Country Parade, and School Assemblies.
- Participation in *Winter Sports District Program* on Saturday mornings.
- *Rewards Method* – used by the Aboriginal teacher – success is rewarded by giving them an Aboriginal word.
- *Clapsticks* usage in the classroom, (by the Aboriginal teacher), as a signals device and for a variety of other purposes, rather than western methods.
- *Publicising Special Achievements and Events* in the local Newspaper.

No schools talked about inter-departmental collaborations as evidence of CCB, although the research team noted involvement of the health and justice departments in some schools, and industry collaborations in others. The concept of community capacity building was not understood in this sense.

Implications for the future: If the difficulties and possibilities of implementing change at the local level are understood, then it is possible to do something about it.

ASSPA Committees

All schools talked about the functioning of their ASSPA Committees. Most were not positive. But from the few positive schools there were reports of "we have more people coming to ASSPA than to our P&C meetings" (Kirwan High School). And in a school, not visited by the research team

> Since X (Indigenous parent) has taken over the leadership of the ASSPA committee, we have had a huge increase in the number of students coming to this school. We've had an end of the year celebration where every student received recognition; a mural painted in the centre of the school, individualized plans for all the Indigenous students, apprenticeships organized, and volunteers for our curriculum committees. Every Indigenous student now has a career plan. We now have a close and excellent working relationship with the ASSPA committee. They play a pivotal role in our school. The Chair in-services our staff on cross cultural issues in teaching as well." (Principal of an urban Catholic High School)

The particular parent has a high profile in the local community and has a high profile across all education sectors.

However, most stories of the ASSPA Committees were not so positive. While much of the blame was put on the ASSPA Committee itself, both by the schools administration and the members of the ASSPA Committees interviewed, there seemed to be little happening in the form of leadership in cooperative and collaborative relations. Many principals left the ASSPA Committees to fend for themselves saying they had to distribute the IESIP money and it was their responsibility. Or, if they were involved, it was only in relation to getting access to the IESIP money. The comments below are from various schools and give an insight into the data the research team received.

Parental participation was often an issue. Some parents do not feel confident enough to play an active role as part of the ASSPA Committee, especially in relation to curriculum issues.

> *They don't feel they have the confidence or the ability to, you know, to participate in things like that.* (ASSPA Committee member)

This tends to result in limited participation and "*the same people are left to do the same thing all the time for the ASSPA Committee*" (ASSPA Committee member). However, it was also noted that involvement in the ASSPA Committee requires two-way participation – from parents as well as from the school. On the one hand, involvement is time-consuming and not all parents want to take up such a commitment.

> *I don't think people want to get involved because you've got to give up so much of your time and people aren't willing to do it.* (ASSPA Committee member)

On the other hand, the view was also put forward that schools need to put more effort into encouraging parental involvement.

> *And I don't think the schools, this is all schools, I don't think the schools encourage parents enough.* (ASSPA Committee member)

An ASSPA Committee member also pointed out that negative comments had been made about ASSPA:

> *I would like to see ASSPA have more of an input into the school. More positive things said about ASSPA rather than the wider community saying, oh it's only for the black kids. And it's really not. You know like the resources and things that are purchased from ASSPA for the school, everyone has an input into it, you know. Like all students have access to it.* (ASSPA Committee member)

Another problem that was identified with ASSPA is that members of the committee do not necessarily agree about how to best use their funds. One member pointed out,

We need to start instilling in our kids that to succeed they really need an academic thing behind them . . . We're not really pushing the academic kids and what I'm finding here in schools is all help is given to the lower kids to get them to the middle. There's no help given to the middle kids to get them up to the top. (ASSPA Committee member)

On the role of the Indigenous Education Workers:

The ASSPA Committee has a lot of trouble getting parents involved and X has a struggle getting parents to come. She does everything in her power. She has meetings at X community and she'll tell parents she'll pick them up and everything like that. There's been a couple of meetings that I've been to and there's been a heap of parents with their kids and all that sort of stuff...(Teacher)

On parental involvement:

...We're focusing on parental involvement and student participation in the school and access to education...because I'm the treasurer too of ASSPA and that's part of the thing – getting out leaflets, flyers and all that just to get the parents there. But we haven't been getting much responses so that's another hard thing too her...(Indigenous Education Worker)

On DETYA guidelines:

DETYA (decided that the shift should be on parental involvement this year), because there wasn't much involvement with parents. We tried to get them, even in informal meetings where we have barbeques, well no-one was coming...(Indigenous Education Worker)

On the benefits of ASSPA in resourcing Indigenous education:

I've often got ASSPA to buy me things...you go to their meeting, you describe what you want and when it comes back you let them know how it works and everything like that. So ASSPA has pretty well paid for most of the stuff. So ASSPA's been great. It's been really good for me to be in ASSPA because...I stay in touch with...the issues that are happening around as far as Indigenous kids go...(Soc Ed Teacher)

Whilst there were positive outcomes being achieved in relation to partnership arrangements between Indigenous communities, industry and government, there were still areas that needed ongoing attention in order to establish the trust and rapport inherent in any productive working relationship. As noted by one Indigenous Community Member:

A lot of these people who have got these big government jobs, they've got no idea what's happening in communities...and yet they are making decisions for us...a lot of them go to Lockhart all dressed up like they thinking it's Christmas...they need educating – running a course for these people who hold these government jobs.

The ASSPA Committee did not appear to be functioning to its full potential, however there was strong evidence of the personal commitment demonstrated by the Indigenous Education Workers in improving parental and community involvement in the committee. Although there were various strategies being implemented to improve participation rates, there remained a general lack of interest on the part of Indigenous parents – the reasons for which were not clearly articulated by the interviewees (for the purpose of this case study).

The ASSPA committee is small due to the low number of enrolments. This committee donates an annual Achievement Award to its Indigenous student who is selected by the teachers.

They supply a start-up kit to each student at the beginning of each year – this kit is mainly stationary supplies. They also buy resources for the College Library. This can be in the form of books or videos.

The ASSPA committee has supplied some camping gear.

The ASSPA committee also has a lack of interest of all parents and try many different strategies to get other parents involved in the schooling of their children and in the schooling environment. The present Committee is seeking more support from other parents.

Even though some schools had higher participation rates in the ASSPA committees than in the P&Cs, IEWs and CECs still complained about the lack of parental involvement. It seemed they wanted everyone involved. One school reported that more people came to ASSPA meetings than they had families in the school. It was a whole community event. The adoption of 'put down language' by the IEWs was an expression of their frustrations rather than a statement of fact in some cases. In some cases the Indigenous staff had adopted the deficit discourse prevalent in Indigenous education. They could not see success when it stared them in the face, and neither could the Principals.

Implications for the future: The recruitment of appropriate Indigenous leaders for ASSPA committees and teaching or administrative staff to work with them will enable groups to function more effectively. The availability of 'what works' type data on ASSPAs will assist groups to function more effectively. Empowering ASSPA committees to have a genuine say in the reporting of community engagement responds to the MACEETYA request for genuine engagement in the school community.

Partners for Success

One of the opportunities Education Queensland schools have to create partnerships with communities is with the *Partners for Success* Strategy. Those schools who had reported attending in-service about this strategy demonstrated a better than average attitude and implementation of partnerships. Because most of this research was carried out in late 2001 and early 2002, only some of the pilot schools reported in-servicing in the strategy. The *Partners for Success*, combined with the New Basics curriculum renewal, is a powerful opportunity for community partnerships, especially in the curriculum. The reason for saying this is, it has measurable outcomes for principals and schools. It is a strategy that Indigenous peak bodies have been demanding for some time.

A case study in early implementation of the Partners for Success Strategy

The interviewees indicated a relatively high level of community input into the school either through formal or informal communication channels. There was evidence to suggest parents took an active role in critiquing school management and curriculum issues in general. The community input was not always representative of Indigenous views however, despite the high level representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Consultative committees such as ASSPA and the P&C Association do not appear to be utilized by Indigenous parents and community members to the same extent as other forums aimed at facilitating community capacity building in a broader context (refer Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement for example).

As noted by one teacher:

> *"...the P & C is open to everyone but again the first P & C meeting I went to there wasn't a single Indigenous face there. We have one Indigenous person, she works at the school, she turns up regularly. But there's certainly not a comfortable quorum there"...(Teacher)*

Involvement of the Community

At a school level, the ASSPA Committee was functioning at various levels of success - the participation of parents cited as the main challenge to its overall effectiveness as an Indigenous decision-making forum. There appeared to be limited linkages between ASSPA and other decision- making forums for the school including the P & C Committee. It was also noted that the community was involved in broader decision-making and consultative forums relating to native title and associated service delivery issues across government. The extent of Indigenous community involvement in the education sector was not always clear, however the interviewees provided numerous examples of existing (and potential) initiatives aimed at facilitating partnership arrangements between the school, industry and the community.

Industry partnerships

There were strong linkages being established between the community, industry, government and education providers, largely facilitated under the auspices of the Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement. According to Comalco's Health Safety, Environment and Communities Report (2000):

> ...strong partnerships with local communities are fundamental to the ongoing success of the business. Mutual respect, active partnerships and demonstrated long-term commitment form the basis of our community approach, and we encourage all staff to take an active role in furthering these relationships. Key initiatives include –
>
> - Queensland Opinion Leader Survey
> - Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement
> - Cross Cultural Awareness Workshops
> - Site based Community Relations Programs."

The Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement is founded on mutual recognition and support of Native Title and mining interests. Key aspects include:

- Annual payments commencing at $4 million per year to a trust managed by Traditional Owner and community representatives to fund development initiatives
- The annual payment includes a State Government contribution of $1.5m
- Additional $500 000 for Aboriginal employment and training
- Recognition and support for Traditional Owner Groups and their claims for Native Title
- Relinquishment of parts of the Comalco lease no longer required for mining
- Cultural heritage protection and cultural awareness training for all Comalco staff and principal contractors in Weipa
  (Comalco Website – www.comalco.com.au)

Community view of Comalco's impact on providing jobs for Indigenous people:

> *"...from what I can see there's a lot of Indigenous people out there working and getting trained and all that and it's good you know. Some of them are getting on with their lives"...(Indigenous Community Member)*

The vocational education programs offered through the school, further promote and formalize the working relationships between the school community and industry.

> *"With our work readiness programs we tap into Comalco primarily for work placements...we're trying to get our kids included in their pre-employment training courses which they run through Mackay TAFE"...(Teacher)*
>
> *"We arranged for the kids to go to a different work site all throughout Comalco looking at what jobs are available...we got Indigenous role models from each of the different sections to then talk to the kids about their job...Comalco looks very strongly at your attendance at*

school…so if you are looking at a job…with Comalco, you have got to show that you can turn up every day to school"…(Teacher)

"…a big part of the agreement is that Comalco will employ a certain percentage of Indigenous people…in the past, we've mainly worked with the Alternative Education Program group…one of the students in that group was successful in obtaining a traineeship with Comalco…we have contact with the schools through the Croc Eisteddfod…(Indigenous Employment Officer, Comalco)

Whole of Government Approaches

It has been acknowledged for some time now that whole of government approaches are needed to provide better co-ordination and thus delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region. With the implementation of the Cape York Partnership Plan, some State government agencies are demonstrating progress towards the development of effective working partnerships and collaborative arrangements between the Government and local communities in the area.

On Education Queensland's Partners for Success:

"…Partners for success packages a vehicle to get through the bureaucracy and industrial impediments…it was decided to have a specific strategy within 2010 to address the Indigenous educational stuff…the idea of compacts…between the school and the community…which all sounds extremely honourable but difficult"…(Principal)

On Partnership Arrangements across Government:

"(Re: School Nurse Position) …I am actually employed by Queensland Health in partnership through Education Queensland…Queensland Health…supply an office, they supply a telephone line for me…Education Queensland also give me a budget"…(School Nurse)

"Health has not been a huge mover in this partnership approach, but locally there has been some work done…I think with the Western Cape College we are really pushing a whole lot of community awareness. We are trying to work with Councils and those people as far as whole of government goes"…(Prinicipal)

"My position…it is actually funded by ECEF – Enterprise Career Education Foundation"…(Teacher)

On the benefits of co-ordination of activities:

"…the advantages of linking all those agencies together? So that we're not doubling up, that's a big thing. We're not separate, we're not going off in our own little tangents…sometimes you can have too much input into a student and not realize it until the stage where a parent or someone throws their hands up and says – I don't want anymore contact"…(Guidance Officer)

The interviewees did not offer specific recommendations however the following represents a broad overview of issues raised in their discussions.

- Review current forums (including ASSPA), which facilitate linkages between the school and the community with a view to improving the participation and involvement of parents and the community in the school's decision-making processes.

- Promote models of best practice in relation to community capacity building and partnerships across government and with industry.

- Work with the broader school community (particularly non-Indigenous parents and students) in promoting the benefits of cultural diversity and awareness in the school's curriculum and other educational activities.

Indigenous Controlled Schools

One of the prime reasons for establishing Indigenous controlled schools was to counteract the lack of Indigenous control over the schooling of Indigenous students. In the schools we visited that were under Indigenous management, we found a strong voice for Indigenous participation. The schools also had Indigenous Boards of Management, which "keep us in touch with community expectations," (teacher).

Wadja Wadja

Wadja Wadja High School is a community-based school situated within an Indigenous community. It is officially titled the Wadja Waja Cooperative for Education and therefore is governed by a Board of Directors, all of whom are from the local Indigenous community. The Board and school management have established links with the Woorabinda Council and other government and non-government organisations in terms of meeting the current and future education and training needs of the community. This has enabled the school to develop vocational programs that benefit the learning and training needs of the students as well as assists the infrastructure development in the community. Therefore the school also has links with contractors for purposes of identifying and providing appropriate training for the vocational education students. Other services such as the health service and the youth service have input into the school in terms of providing programs to enhance the life skills of the students.

Community Capacity Building

While there is no formal community capacity building framework the size of the community and the interactions of the school with the community has inadvertently facilitated community capacity building. The Principal reported:

> It's (Woorabinda) a small community so interaction (between school and community) is obvious and informal
>
> The school board has an active involvement in the school and there is a very active relationship between Board members and the school
>
> The school is an incorporated body therefore it has been set up as a catalyst for business/income opportunities.
>
> I believe that Wadja Wadja High School is at the cutting edge in change in education in terms of moving away from formal structures so as to make education relevant to the community.
>
> Health people come every week and show videos etc... every Tuesday one class for boys and one class for girls [IEW]

On the other hand, while there are clear, positive links with the Woorabinda Council, the hospital, youth services, contractors and government agencies, parental involvement is seen to be minimal.

> While 40-50% of parents/care givers seem supportive of their children and the school, only 10% actually attend meetings and other school events. [Principal]

> Parental involvement is important and if they don't get parental support then the kids don't participate. [Principal]
>
> We go around in the bus every morning and we stop at every house and blow the horn and sing out loud...their mum's be sitting in the yard...oh they sleep come back later...they need encouragement from their parents. Very hard if you don't get the parents support. But as soon as that Abstudy cuts they (the parents) right here complaining. [IEW]

Boarding school partnerships with schools

Boarding schools across Queensland have had a long and diverse history in relations with Indigenous communities. This study of 24 schools included 4 boarding schools. From them the following elements were found to be effective practices:

- *Strong leadership* by a Principal who has a positive attitude to students and communities, and is organized and an effective manager
- Giving senior student roles and responsibilities in the boarding school
- Working hard to make the ASSPA committee effective. Some strategies that worked were:
    - Teleconferencing ASSPA meetings
    - Having an active and responsible staff member who worked with the ASSPA committee
    - Giving parents email addresses so they could write to their children
    - Giving the students digital cameras so they can put photos online for their families to see
- Maintaining close contact and *good relations* with Centrelink
- Assisting students to do the paperwork required to get back to school
- Following up on students who did not return to school
- Having a contact in the community who would assist in getting students back to school
- Encouraging *family visits* by providing accommodation and an arrangement of free accommodation for help in the school while present
- Staff *visiting communities* during the holidays and at other times during the year
- Artists in residence from the communities
- Lots of weekend activities so that boredom is relieved
- High calibre boarding staff who have a positive attitude to working with students
- Following up on graduate students placements in work or other
- Having an active alumni
- Having high profile Indigenous speakers
- Having an inclusive curriculum
- Having regular newsletters that went back to the communities (lots of photos)
- Developing friendly relations with the students while being firm with students about the rules
- Developing in-school suspensions while keeping the parents informed
- Longevity of staff assisted in forming quality relationships in communities
- Head hunting quality staff

Most boarding schools had some of these effective strategies in place. However, there were issues raised with the research team that showed that boarding schools were often seen as safe havens from violent and abusive people. The effectiveness of the boarding school also depended on the strength of the leadership shown by the Principal. In many situations this was not strong and these schools seemed to be in the limbo of "we're gunna do this and we're gunna do that." But in fact, there were no plans to do anything. High turn over of staff provided a problem with continuity. While those schools where staff stayed for sometime had better relationships with the communities. Schools who head hunted staff were those schools who had less staff turnover.

Abergowrie Catholic College

A case study in effective boarding school community partnerships

> The school is a good place "it makes things work". (Year 12 student)

Background
Located 40 kms from Ingham in North Queensland, Abergowrie College is Catholic Education Queensland's largest Indigenous school, with approximately 240 students enrolled in grades 8 to 12 (as at February 2002). Approximately 75% of the student body is Indigenous – about 100 Torres Strait Islanders and about 80 Aboriginal boys. It caters exclusively for boys in a rural boarding school setting.

Abergowrie's mission is to "assist in the holistic education of each unique individual in the community... The College cherishes its option for Christ's poor. The value of family life and the special needs of Australia's rural community is respected and understood. Moreover, cultural diversity and the complex needs of Indigenous peoples are valued and embraced" (Abergowrie College Mission Statement). The school prides itself on providing an education that respects young men and their special needs. The school staff are made aware of Indigenous issues through a planned flow of readings and information by the school management team, and the ethos of the school acknowledges Indigenous culture:

> The community of Abergowrie College, its staff, students and families, acknowledge the Warrugmay People, traditional owners of this land. (Policy Handbook, Acknowledgements)

A UN Report (March 2000) found that most Indigenous students last only one term at Queensland boarding schools. Abergowrie College's average stay for student leavers in 1999 was two years and one term. The students interviewed for this project, who were mainly Year 12s, all reported that they thought the school was an excellent place to be.

> I'm from the NT. I came here because there was more opportunities for sport. This school really changed me. It turned me around. At the state school I didn't study. They made me study here. People here said I could be a role model for younger people. I was elected as Vice Captain this year, people look up to me and that is why I had respect and I had respect for them, so that is probably why they say I'm a role model for the younger people. It's a great honour knowing that people look up to me. If young people in trouble they listen to us rather than the teachers. (Year 12 student)

Indigenous students are significantly represented at 75% of the overall student population (200 students). This includes students from the Torres Strait Islands and from Aboriginal communities all over Australia, although most come from North Queensland. 25% of the student body is non Indigenous students mainly from rural and remote areas of Queensland. Teachers reported that many of the students have had gaps in their education. This is due mainly to non attendance at school in their younger years.

Abergowrie College gives the older boys roles and responsibilities more in line with their responsibilities at home. Young men are often made responsible for younger boys. The boys responded well to this trust.

> Teachers and Dorm staff give us support and encouragement, give us responsibility. ¾ of the school is Indigenous boys. So we talk to the younger boys – settle them down – what to do and what not to do. (Yr 12 boy)

> Teachers treat me like a dorm master. They treat me like an adult. Give me jobs to do like getting kids to bed and signing off on homework. (Yr 12 boy)

Abergowrie head hunts staff, and have some staff who have had a long history at the school. Newly recruited and long term Indigenous staff also play a major role as role models and mentors.

Parental and Family Involvement

Being a Boarding School creates its own set of problems when involving community members in the school. Abergowrie has made some changes this year to ensure parental participation:

> We have a Board, P&F, ASSPA, TCEO reps, it is difficult. The closest parents are at Yarrabah, we have to fund them thru VEGAS or something if they are to come to the school for meetings. So we have changed our approach for this year. We do teleconferences with about 6-7 people at a time. We are trying this to see how it works. (Teacher)

The school now teleconferences ASSPA meetings with representative families in the remote communities the boys come from. This is in a trial phase and seems to work better than the usual model.

Many boys came to Abergowrie from schools that only went up to Year 10. This meant that students who wanted to go onto year 11 or 12 had to go away from their communities to go to school. The responsibility for organizing this falls to the parents. *The school works hard to make contact with communities so that there is a seamless progression from the community school to Abergowrie.* Some parents, however, for various reasons, do not make arrangements for their sons, while other students are lost through the lack of a coordinated approach to fostering students to complete 12 years of schooling or its equivalent. Cape communities, Torres Strait Island schools, Yarrabah and Palm Island are key feeder schools into Abergowrie.

Issues with Centrelink

Administrators, during their community visits, used the time to do a lot of follow-up work on Abstudy so that students could get to school on time. Some of these staff have been at the school for many years and have developed relationships with people in the communities.

> We also advise them (the parents or carers) how to do the Centrelink forms. Abstudy funding pays their fees. If their parents are earning then they don't get support. The school gets the fees from Abstudy. We try to work with Centrelink – keeping them on track.

> You have to get involved, find out why they are not coming. The paperwork is so difficult. A lot of students come late because of that. Centrelink change their policies, e.g. on travel. If Centrelink did a block booking kids wouldn't turn up. Now they only book them if the parents ring up. This [implementation] was too soon and we weren't ready for it. But having the parent in the community is a great help. (Administrator)

> Attention to detail is important. I go [on visits to the communities] to make contact with people. Parents want to know how they can get money to students. They might want to know how to use Bpay rather then send money orders, which cost a lot. Before 'proof of identity' to open an account from this year students have to have 100 points. (Administrator)

> Turnover is a cost. Having someone familiar is a good thing. I've been here 13 years. In the past we've gone to big displays in Townsville and Brisbane. But we do better if we go to the communities themselves. The need is greater there. The paperwork is getting more and more difficult. (Administrator)

Boarding School and Family Visits

The school also has accommodation for visiting parents and families. They can repay the cost of the boarding by helping out in the school during their stay. Emails were also set up for boys and families to communicate with each other. Digital cameras enable them to download photos for placing on the net, too.

A big effort has been made by the school to *follow up on graduate placements*.

> The 1999 graduates were chased up to see where they had gone – we had 38 kids of which half were Indigenous. 36 had TAFE, Uni or jobs; 2 are on CDEP at one community. So out of all the kids every single one of them is out and occupied and doing something. Last year most of them

went out on work experience. The boarding school does set kids up for life outside. But that is one of the big questions for us: we give them a life style that is white middle class lifestyle and sending them back to an Indigenous community where they are living in third world situations – no access to jobs. (Administrator)

The kids are going back to communities and can get jobs there in CDEP, I'm disappointed that we can't get them involved in Townsville and Cairns TAFE and Uni. The boys don't take it up. (Teacher)

The Counsellor said that *the best in service was to visit the communities the students came from:*

I say teachers do a good job, but a lot of it is self help. There must be knowledge out there. Instead of getting up a speaker for the day for PD why not say all staff have to go and visit an Indigenous community. Here's the money to do it.

The school has set up a buddy system for new teachers. As a new member comes in they are taken through an induction program. It is informal but at the same time they need to learn to get along with other teachers and the students.

Staff from the school visit the islands and communities where the students come from as a priority. Each September a group of 4 (teacher, boarding master, and administrators) travel to the communities. While the intent is recruitment, the teachers reported that they get more out of it in terms of understanding where the boys are coming from. The administrator says it gives her the opportunity to make community contact so that when they phone up from the school, they can put a face to a name.

With communities it is important to have someone there to round up the kids to get them back to school. If we have someone in the community who is important – key people – we tell them the problem, paperwork or whatever and they will help solve it on the ground. It would make it difficult if we didn't have them there. It is having an understanding of where the kids are from. The prices of the food are just impossible. We take things for granted, but when you visit the shops in the communities you see how expensive things are and what little supplies they have. (Administrator)

In the middle of the year I go to the Mt Isa Show. I let them know we are still here. Then up to Burketown and Doomadgee. I get the mothers out for dinner. Croydon, Aurakun sometimes. You can't get the fathers out but we do get the mothers. I go to their homes and it does play dividends. We had a big group from Normanton because of that contact. . . . But they gang up if there are too many of them. Many of the ringers' boys are racist at first, and you can't have one big group of any one group. They fight. ... There is a respect for the boys. There is little bullying. We don't let it get up there. The kids have to feel safe. I am fairly strict but I will look after them. The kids are happy otherwise they would run away or go home. (Boarding House Master)

A grandmother from Hopevale is an artist and she is being funded to come down, another one is from Hammond Is and they live in and teach the kids.

Whole of Government Approach
In taking a 'whole of government approach' to community capacity building, the Principal said:

We have little contact with local community. The shire council will come out to various things. I asked him to do something about blue light discos. I'm having a meeting next week in town with the Aboriginal Health from Townsville, trying to get some health services out here at the college. Not just the dental van, we do the hearing tests here. Can we do a general health check of all the students? Put the non Indigenous through too and I'll pay for them. The kids health care is fairly poor be it scabies or whatever. We need a greater awareness program. We have a full time nurse. She runs clinics and takes kids into town. We chase agency help but it is very difficult to get. Some think we want something for nothing, but I say it would be helpful for you. The boys are going back

to the communities, so they can take back a little health knowledge. A bit more health care, testing. It is hard to get them involved.

We only chase funds for sporting or extra curricular activities like dancing. The gambling authority does give us something. We don't go into other outside groups to fund us. Sometimes I don't feel that I am doing as good as I could, because we are so stretched for funds. I'm always trying to chase money for a new staff member. I want someone to review the year 8 curriculum. But I can't get the money to do it.

The state per capita money goes to the CEO and it doesn't come to us. It frustrates me. A lot of our kids 2/3 are just partially funded and we can't get the money out of the kids. How do you do it if you don't have cooperation? There is continuity between state schools that we don't have. We are like an island. We don't have feeder schools. We have kids from all over the place.

On involving local people in the school, it was felt that parents, who are not always located in the local community, are the ones that really need to be involved. Sometimes local politics gets in the way of the issues of the school. And if their children are not going to the school, then the school can get dragged into things it doesn't need to be involved in. On the other hand local input into the school is highly valued:

This area is Girrijun country. I have Russell Butler up here to do workshops and camps with the kids. Have done for 10 years. His family have a connection here. . .

Native Title issues are political and if you are not careful they can interfere with the school. . .

Noel Pearson was here to speak at our Prize giving and he is busy in his own communities. Some boys from Murray Is are very proud of Eddie Mabo and they love it when you visit their islands. It is terrific visiting parents. They put it to you "What are you doing for my boy?" Why aren't you teaching our language. So I say that "we don't have teachers, you find it hard here – how about us?" (Principal)

I think the rhetoric is right. I think about how this school struggles for every cent it gets. We don't come up on the disadvantaged list. We are not valued as it ought to be. This school and Palm Island carry the weight of Indigenous Education in Catholic Education. A recognition of general hard work would be good. It is different work from mainstream schools. At the glossy brochure level it is recognized, but not in words. Working at a school like this will not get your name up in lights. (Counsellor)

One of the strengths of the school is that it is intentionally striving to meet the needs of the 'poorer' boys. It has to be creative because of its isolation. "The dorm staff are part of our strength. It is a safe place for boys." (Staff member). There is also an area of the school called POINT. In 1938 a student wrote about how important this area was, so it has a long history.

We have men from the 1930s coming back and they just want to go there and sit and be quiet. It overlooks the cane and river. The boys can go to the fig tree or the scrub. The boys have a deep spirituality. (Counsellor)

Does the work with the local community come before how we work with the communities from which the students come? We need to go to the parents. Better to have ASSPA on teleconference rather than have one person come down to the school from the local area. . . . Our newsletter is very parent friendly. It comes out once a term put out by the residential staff. They take note of which photos haven't been in so every student gets their photo in the paper. It is big on pictures and small on print. It is so appreciated by parents. It gets posted out. It is our way to go. I haven't seen this in boarding schools before. It is funded from tuckshop.

Issues

Many staff and students commented on the excellent program that the boarding school runs for the students.

> What makes this school a good place? Mix of cultures. Boys school. We don't have to be caged up. The security is not too hard. I like it that there is only boys here. Mr G is good he cheers you up if you are having a miserable time. He takes you swimming to swimming holes and the beach. Fishing. Camping. 30 or 40 if they put their names down if they want to go. If they don't go they stay in the dorm, watch TV, playstations, swimming in the pool. Play games on the oval, basketball, cricket. Last year we got flooded in. It was raining all the time. The school take dance troupes down to other schools and places. They go to Brisbane and other tours. They visited about 37 schools. They take Aboriginal, TI and PNG dancers. ... If you miss out on one thing there is always something else to do. (Year 12 student)

> Once a week the kids have to get out of here. We take them to Townsville a lot. All the activities are in the school fees. So they don't have to be paying as they go. I took 110 down to Townsville – some went to the movies and others went to the footy. You can't leave 80 or so boys here all weekend. We go to the beach or down to T'ville. We keep them busy. Kids were running away before because they were bored. Now they are so tired on Sunday night they are all asleep by 9pm. (Boarding House Master)

> Some students come here and all they have is a little bag. It is humbling. We provide them with sheets and other things they need. The weekends are packed full of fun things to do. (Administration)

Other boarding school issues

Four boarding schools were among the 23 schools visited by the research team. While Abergowrie demonstrated the most coordinated and committed approach to school community partnerships, the following issues were raised by all.

Violence and abuse in communities was also cited as a reason for students staying on at school. One girl returned to her home community after she was suspended and was bashed up on arrival, not by her family but by a rival. She returned to school and begged to be allowed to stay. Several house parents reported that students often do not want to go home for holidays because they fear abuse and violence. They also fear getting caught up in gangs. A boarding house parent said:

> And yet they've grown up in domestic violence situations, they've seen people cut open you know, and nearly in one case killed, yet they felt comfortable. That was their security because that's the way they were brought up and they didn't know any better. And we're encouraging these children by not educating them to want more of this, you know, to know that there is more out there. We're encouraging them to go back in that and raise their children in that. (Boarding parent)

> A lot of students suffer from depression or they've been traumatized. Things like that make it difficult to even stay in school at all let alone finish year 12. It would be very difficult to concentrate on school work when you have been severely traumatized or you're severely depressed and your thoughts are scattered and school is not the most important thing to. Safety is the most important thing to you and a lot of kids come here because it is safer than home. We have to try and understand that, that safety is their foremost need and education comes down the line somewhere after they are assured that they are getting three meals a day and they've got real clothes and they've got their own space. (Boarding parent)

> ... I got one child, one boy, who when he comes here to school he never gets in trouble, never gets in trouble. When he goes home for two weeks, every single night he was home he was charged with breaking and entering or some other criminal offence. But the stability that they get here as

well as they get the boundaries that they need, where they don't have that in home. So ....in a boarding situation is probably different to home situation. But I know there have been lots of kids that have come here and said, they're not necessarily here for the education but they are here for the stability. But it does, if they stay here long, if they come here long enough it does grow on them. (House parent)

And also a lot of things that's happening now, today in their lives with you know, deaths in custody, our community employment rates down, land rights issues, a lot of things going on in the media and a lot of things going on in the schools and in the communities and I know education is an important thing and the support that I get is a spiritual thing. (House parent)

Boys don't want to go home at holiday time. One boy from X community said he didn't want to go home because all he had to go home to was "drinking alcohol and fighting and here I have a bed, food and things to do". We do more for the kids here than if they go home. (Boarding House parent)

Students came from a different perspective and commented on why some students didn't come away to school:

... some don't want to come to school because alcohol in the community, drugs, just don't want to leave their friends because they grew up just knowing alcohol and drugs and stealing and I don't know just doing .....stuff with their friends. Probably just scared to leave because they don't know what it's like here. Probably most of them never even been to school, just grew up on the street, running a muck, yeah that's all. Some here just have emotional problems too, just think that they are nobody sometimes and because of their skin colour they can't get anywhere in life.

Yeah, that was a bit of a big problem for me when I was back up at (home town). But I managed to get through it because my mates you know, that's how I got to know them white fellas, they didn't, no worry about race, colour or anything like that. Yeah, and that's how I got to know them good, but I just thought you know, I wanted to get out because of my families was drinking and stuff like that and I just had to get away from that you know. That's why I came down here.

Other staff thought that *the CDEP in communities* played a part in students having little motivation to study and achieve educationally.

They have no motivation past going back to their communities. The students from communities that are on royalties find no need to work. Those from the Torres Straits fall back on their fishing. They don't have a school culture.

Boarding schools that do not seem to work for community capacity building
There was a lot of low-morale among staff in some of the other boarding schools visited. As well, a number of staff indicated that "this is what should be happening," knowing that it was never likely to happen, at least while the current administration was unchanged. Some tensions were observed between Indigenous staff and the administration of these schools.

Using community input on expulsions and suspensions

I said years ago I said this school needs a member of justice here, a justice committee so that we can justify when we got a child that get expelled or suspended or sent home they would be able to do that see. On X community ..... they got a justice group you see, and they can justify whether they treat a lot of people out back in the community or not see. This finishing sentence in jail, so you'd probably have a waiting period of two years or a couple of months to be allowed back in the community and that's what this school needs to have, something like that where we can determine whether, you know, a group of elders can determine whether the child can be justified that things

are done wrong. Whereas now it's just the principal making decisions whether you expel or just suspend a student.

Community input on policies and decision making:

> I think our indigenous population need to have some voice in the policies and things in our society and there need to be more upward mobility, movement by our indigenous young people and equally educated and trained as the wider community, therefore that will improve the social structure and they will be able to make decisions that affect them. And at the moment there are a lot of issues that are made by other people who are non-indigenous sometimes its lack of proper understanding of how to help our people.
>
> It would be good to establish data and policies on consultation and networking with our communities where we draw our students from.
>
> We go out to the communities a lot to recruit students but I would like to see trips to communities to consult with the communities about what they would like to see happening at the school. What sorts of things and what their involvement could be. I would like to see a lot more consultation happening.

The challenge of maintaining contact with parents from the remote areas is understandably difficult. The emphasis was primarily on attempting to get the parents to come to the school. This approach was met with varying levels of success, but one staff member felt that in order to make it successful, it required more commitment on the part of the senior staff:

> I believe that this is something that should happen. That they should utilise – and this is a thing that's not happening here in this school. Money available for parents to come in for speech night – I believe this year's – this is really telling tales out of school – I believe this year it was brushed off as it was too much of a hassle.

The extent to which school staff members were able make regular visits out to the Indigenous communities was unclear. Visits had been made in the past and had been seen as quite valuable in terms of making essential links with the various communities and showing the students that they were valued by the school.

Community Capacity Building or the lack of it

While the subject of community capacity building was raised several times in the course of the interviews, there was little response to the topic. The lack of response probably stems more from a lack of understanding of the issue than a resistance or negative response to the idea of capacity building. However, the relatively low key efforts made on behalf of the school to involve the community in the school's own development, might indicate that, even if they had a more developed understanding of the notion of community capacity building, the school might not see that it had a significant role to play in the process. The question was not put directly to the staff, so it may be unfair to speculate.

A number of key issues came to light in the course of the data collection and analysis for these case studies. Students work very hard to achieve against the odds of poor literacy and numeracy skills, distance from home, operating outside their own culture and in the absence of role models. Equally staff are working hard to ensure that students are being given a chance to achieve a year 12 certificate and to gain some of the skills they need to go on to achieve in their post-secondary school years.

It does, however, seem that the balance of the efforts to ensure that students achieve are focused on the school campus. The crucial role played by parents and extended family is almost completely absent from the picture. Understanding that the situation is difficult, it does seem that some solution must be found to bridging the gap between the school and the parents in order that the school is in a position to respond to the particular needs and requirements of the Indigenous students and their home communities. As it stands now, one of the few times parents or relatives are contacted is to be informed that their child is being disciplined. Parents and communities dispatch their children to the care of a school at great

emotional and financial cost (special funding aside, they must still find funds for transport, uniforms, etc.), believing that both they and the child are sacrificing in the short-term for the benefits of a sound education in the longer-term. If, because of an incongruence of understanding and a clash of culture, the child comes home with sub-standard literacy and numeracy skills and is fundamentally ill equipped for participation in society, then the trust in the system has been misplaced.

It would seem that most high schools are making a number of efforts to address the academic challenges of the Indigenous students. The transition class, in one school, and the addition help for literacy and numeracy for senior students will be an essential element of the Indigenous students' educational foundation. However, the apparent lack of legitimacy or value placed on the special "Indigenous Studies" classes has an extremely undermining effect upon the belief that the students have in themselves and in their own cultural background, as well as on the larger staff and student body. This, in addition to the absence of real mentors or role models within the school and limited contact with their own culture and identity beyond the school, seems to set up an environment where the students are almost existing in a cultural vacuum.

The Indigenous students are not present merely to last the time until they can collect their year 12 certificate and go home. They should have the same expectations as every other student (non-Indigenous or otherwise) – that is to acquire the necessary skills and understandings to pursue a healthy and productive life. While it is easy to become immersed in the day-to-day management and minutiae of the school curriculum, the real purpose of the process (ie the achievement of the certificate) must be kept in perspective. Without involving the students and their communities in the process of schooling and education the end product will undoubtedly be a certificate of attendance and staying power rather than an achievement. It seems that, in this instance, the school, in conjunction with the larger systemic authority, must extend its scope beyond the established format and routine of its own system and understanding, to incorporate the essential understandings, values and knowledge system of *ALL* of its student body.

There were a number of general recommendations made by the staff members in the course of the interviews. They fell into three broad categories of supporting the staff to work more effectively with the Indigenous students, supporting the Indigenous students more effectively and creating improved links with parents and communities.

- I would like a day when all the parents of these kids come into the college here and sit down and have a big talk and ask what the hell is going on or even ask the parents "what do you expect from us". "Why are you spending all this money to send your kid here – just to get him out of the community?"

- I believe that that is something that should happen. That they should utilise – and this is something that is not happening here in this school - money available for parents to come for speech night. For these kids to see family is really important and they often don't go on leave....So to have family come twice a year would be such a big thing.

Conclusion

The QIECB is the peak Indigenous Body reporting to and advising the Minister of Education on issues pertaining to Indigenous Education in Queensland. Early in 2001 the IECB commissioned six research projects to inform them about the most pertinent issues impacting on Indigenous Education. These issues arose from the Interim Strategic Plan 2000-2001. This project, *Community Capacity Building*, emerged out of the need to establish learning communities that have the capacity to address collaboratively issues contributing to educational disadvantage. It was appropriate given the Queensland Government's strategy *Partners for Success*, was just being introduced to schools across the state.

The research team was asked to review the concept of Community Capacity Building by identifying and reporting on current strategies and initiatives both planned and being undertaken by school communities.

When this study commenced in late 2001, State Government schools were only just beginning to participate in training for *Partners for Success*. Many did not understand the concept of community capacity building. Those that had done the training had a far greater understanding of the philosophical underpinnings and implementation issues. Catholic and Independent schools already had the concepts but used different language. Catholic schools have always been strong on school/church/community relationships. They talked about participative community from that angle. Independent schools have a common understanding of partnerships with community, especially if they were Independent community schools.

The terms *community partnerships* or *parental involvement* were better understood and this is reflected in the data collected. *Parental involvement*, however, is a difficult term because in so many Indigenous communities the person responsible for a student might not be a parent but an uncle, aunty, grandparent or other extended family member. New terms are needed so that the hegemony of the dominant discourse does not dictate what should be happening in schools with Indigenous children. Community capacity building or school community engagement is a moment of opportunity to re think how Indigenous people are positioned in education in a more wholistic way. Community capacity building should not be just a surveillance mechanism.

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